

Esteemed Senators and Representatives:

We come to you today as people of faith in support of Proposed Governor's Bill 6390 and/or Senate Bill 40, the Connecticut DREAM Act, which would provide in-state tuition for children of undocumented immigrants. We do not come only because it makes sound economic sense to do everything we can to insure that all of Connecticut's workforce, both documented and undocumented, have the skills necessary to compete and be gainfully employed in the 21st century. We come most of all because the biblical witness compels us to speak out on behalf of the resident alien in our midst.

We feel compelled to make this statement because we know that immigrants, like all of us, are individuals of sacred worth made in God's image. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were cast out of the Garden of Eden to live an alien existence in a land that was not originally their own. We know that Abraham and Sarah—the father and mother of the nations--were immigrants. Moses was an immigrant in the land of Midian. He led the Israelites, who were immigrants in the land of Egypt, out of bondage. Ruth the Moabite, mother of the Davidic line, was an immigrant in ancient Israel. We know that David fled from Saul and became an immigrant among the Philistines. Esther, who went on to become Queen of all of Persia, was a Jew, the daughter of immigrants.

We know that Jesus was an immigrant in the land of Egypt as a young boy, and that his family eventually settled in Nazareth as immigrants to avoid persecution by Herod Archelaus in Judea. When Jesus became a man, he emigrated to Capernaum by Galilee. Jesus is known for saying, "[f]oxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

The Hebrew Bible is overrun with laws and proscriptions to treat the resident alien within our midst as we would ourselves. Consistent throughout is the view that because the Hebrew people were once aliens in the land of Egypt, they should not oppress the resident alien (Exodus 22:21; Exodus 23:9). Exodus 23:9 reads: "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." I would ask you, as Senators and Representatives, if any of your forebears were once aliens in this land.

With respect to the legislation before you, the ancient authorities recognized a sort of Golden Rule. Leviticus 19:33-34 reads: "³³ When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." In all things, the Hebrews recognized aliens' equality before the law, as in Leviticus 24:22: "You shall have one law for the alien and the citizen: for I am the Lord your God."

In ancient Israel, there was a practice called gleaning. It meant leaving out spare sheaves of grain, not reaping to the very edges of one's field, and allowing fallen and left over grapes to be gathered for the benefit of the resident alien and the poor. (Leviticus 19:9-10¹, 23:22²;

¹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God."

Deuteronomy 24:19-22³). The modern economy does not always have fields in which to glean, *per se*. But this in-state tuition bill is a perfect example where modern-day gleanings can be made available for the alien in our midst.

We therefore ask and pray that you will give favorable consideration to Senate Bill 40.

Sincerely,

Ximena Diaz-Varas
Co-Chair, Immigration Task Force of the New York Annual Conference of The United
Methodist Church
Derby, CT

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New Milford United Methodist Church
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Prospect United Methodist Church
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Rev. Woodrow W. Eddins, Jr.
Simsbury UMC

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